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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONTROLLING A MACHINE THROUGH AN INTERRUPTED OPERATION**

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See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method of controlling a machine through an interrupted operation of the machine is provided. The method includes retrieving an existing load signal indicative of an existing external load on the machine by a controller prior to the interrupted operation. The method includes calculating an available load capacity for the machine defined as a difference between a maximum load capacity of the machine and the existing external load by the controller. Further, the method includes controlling the machine to execute a working operation by the controller corresponding to the available load capacity of the machine.

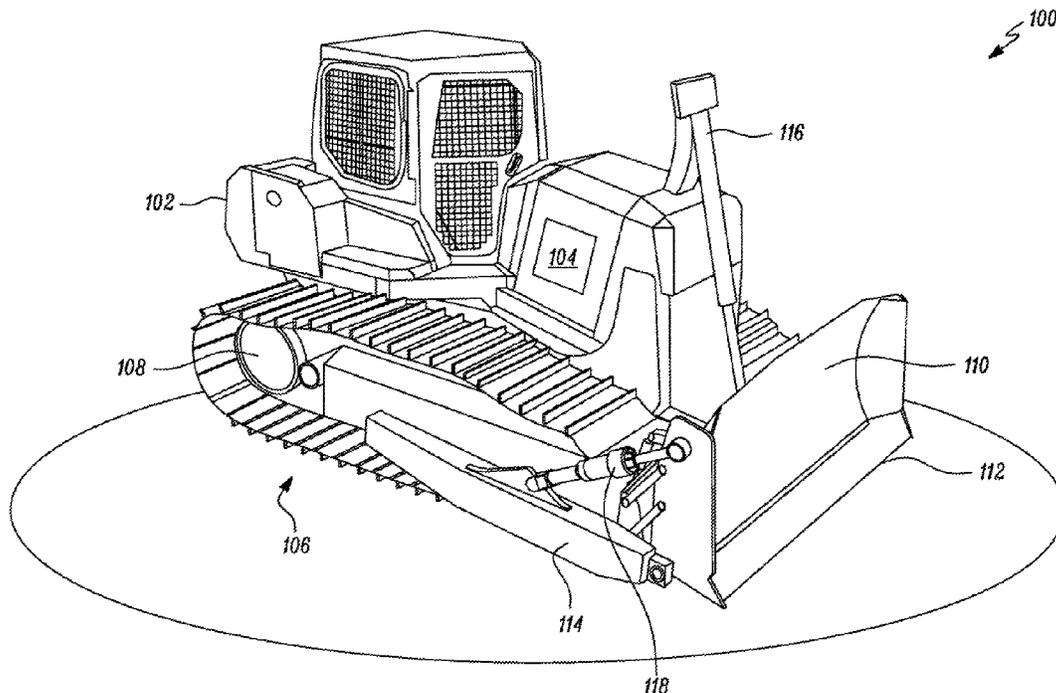
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(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC ... **E02F 9/2029**; **E02F 3/40**; **E02F 3/43**; **E02F 3/60**

20 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



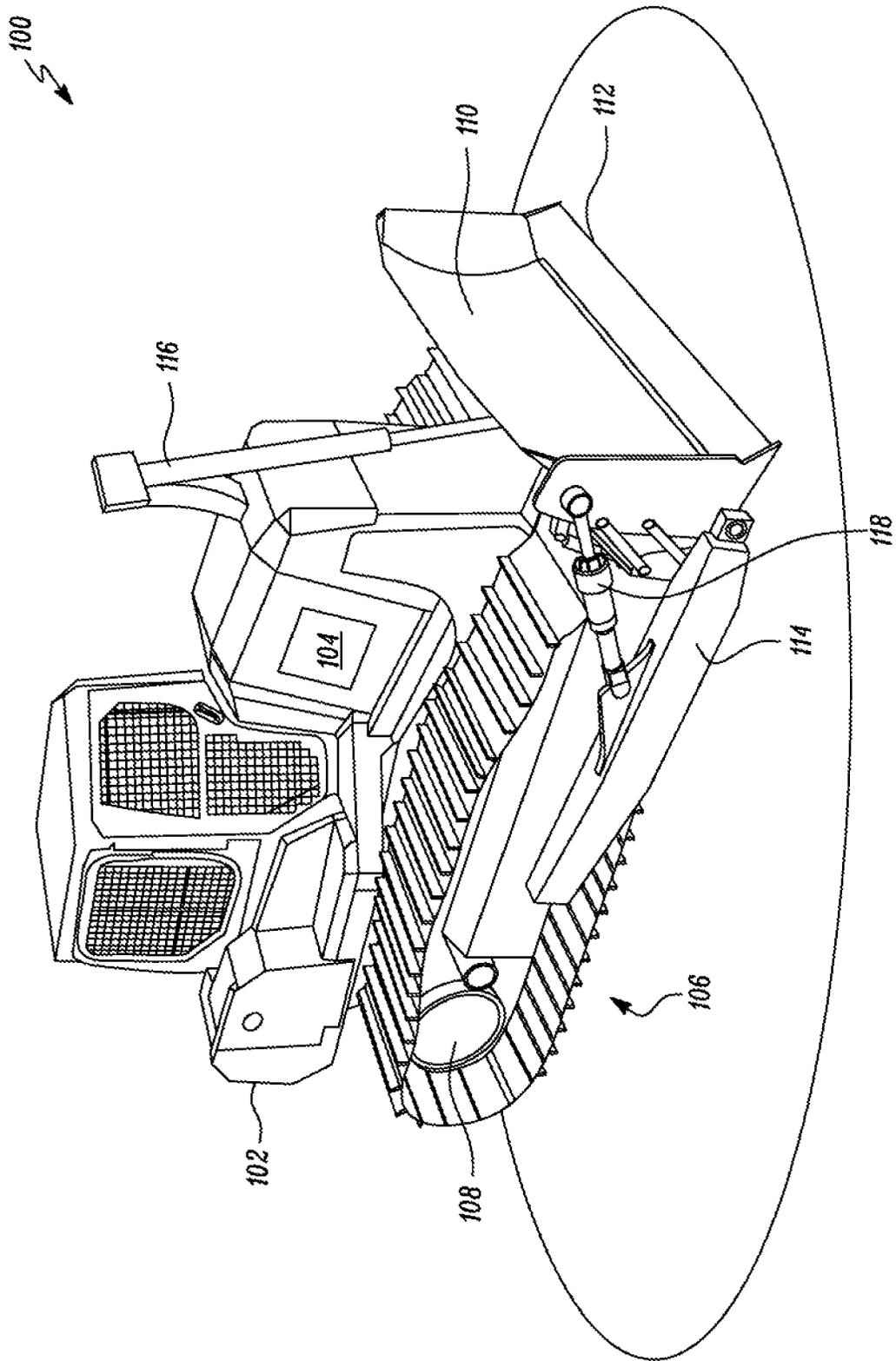


FIG. 1

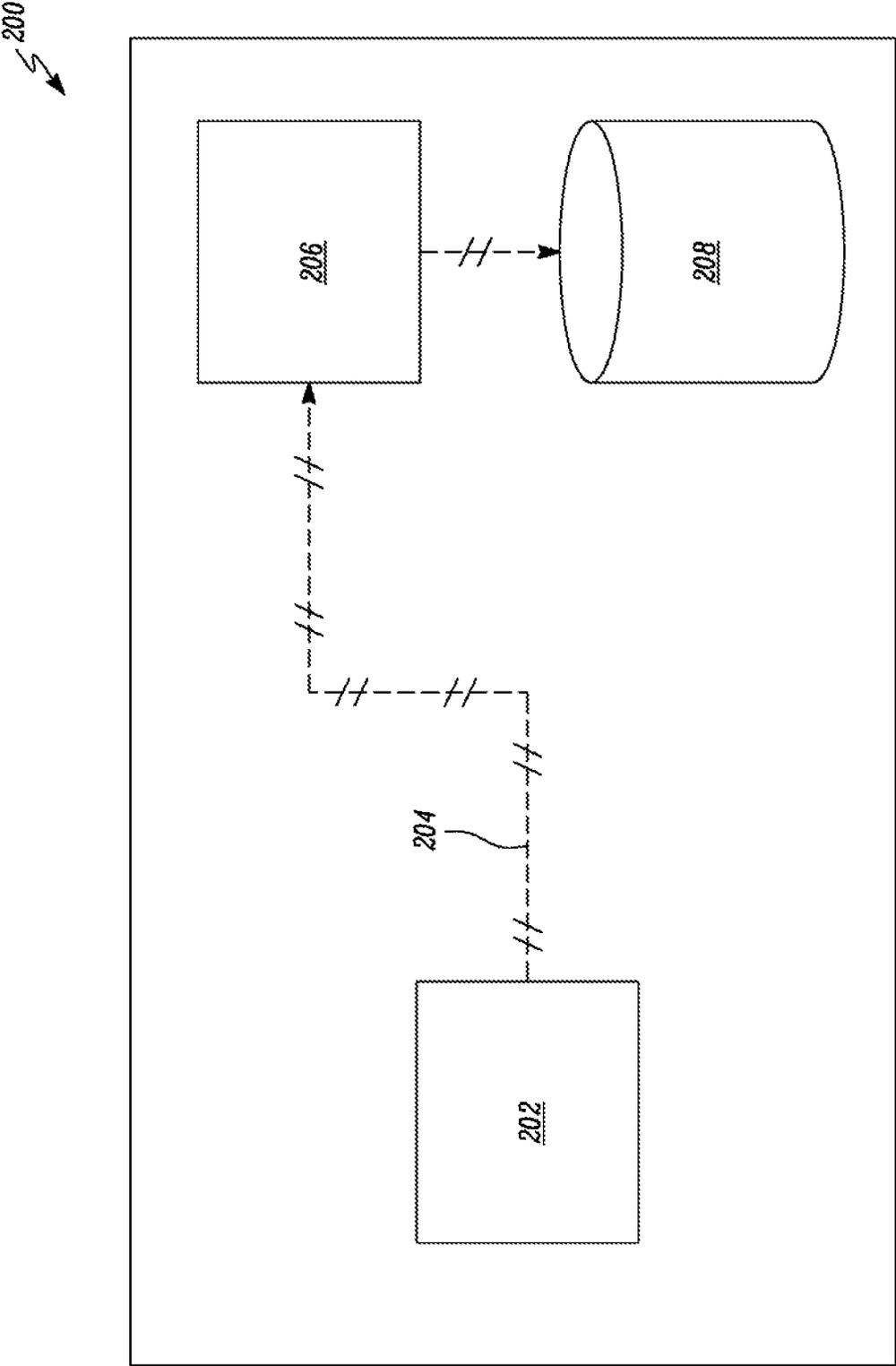


FIG. 2

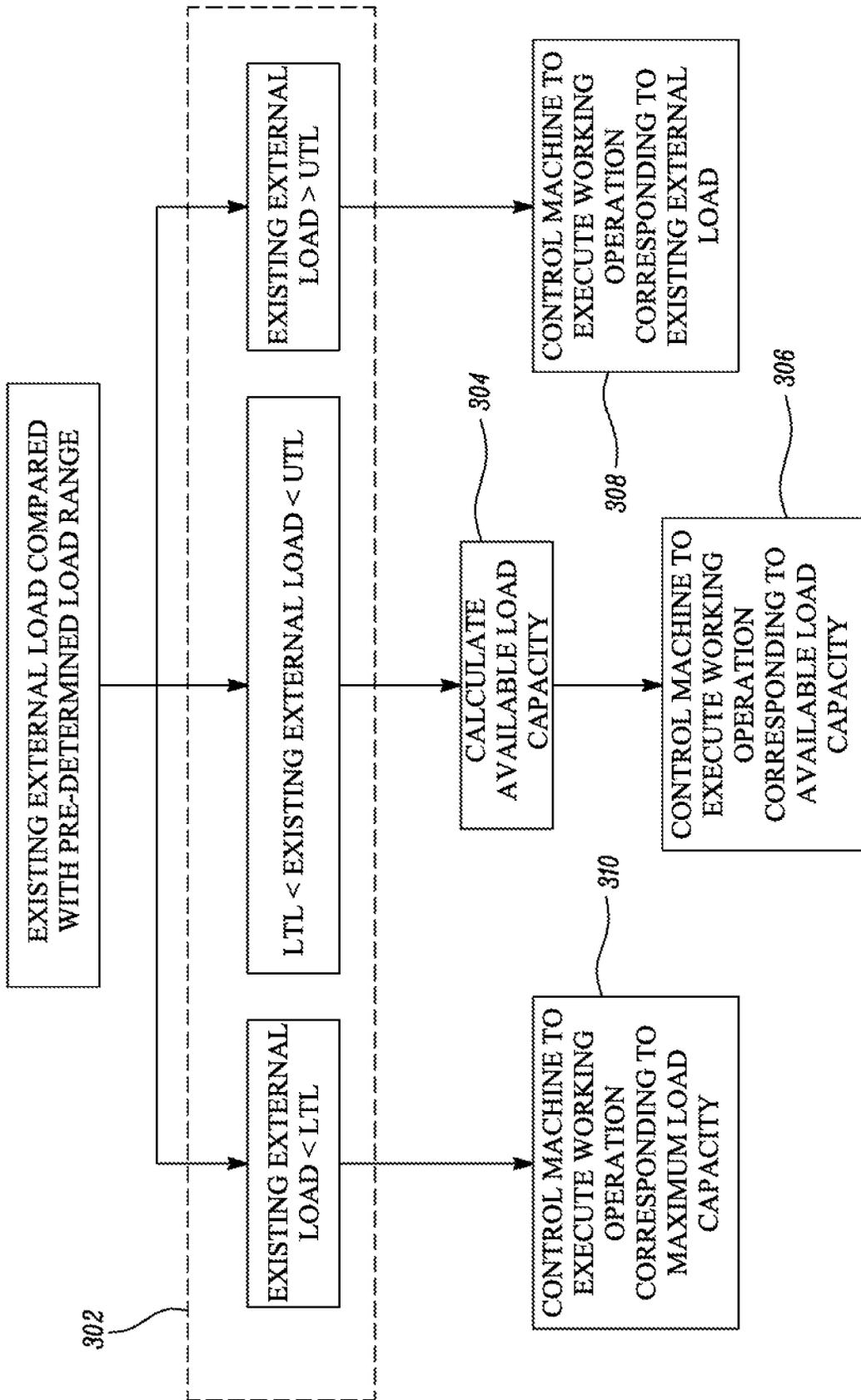


FIG. 3

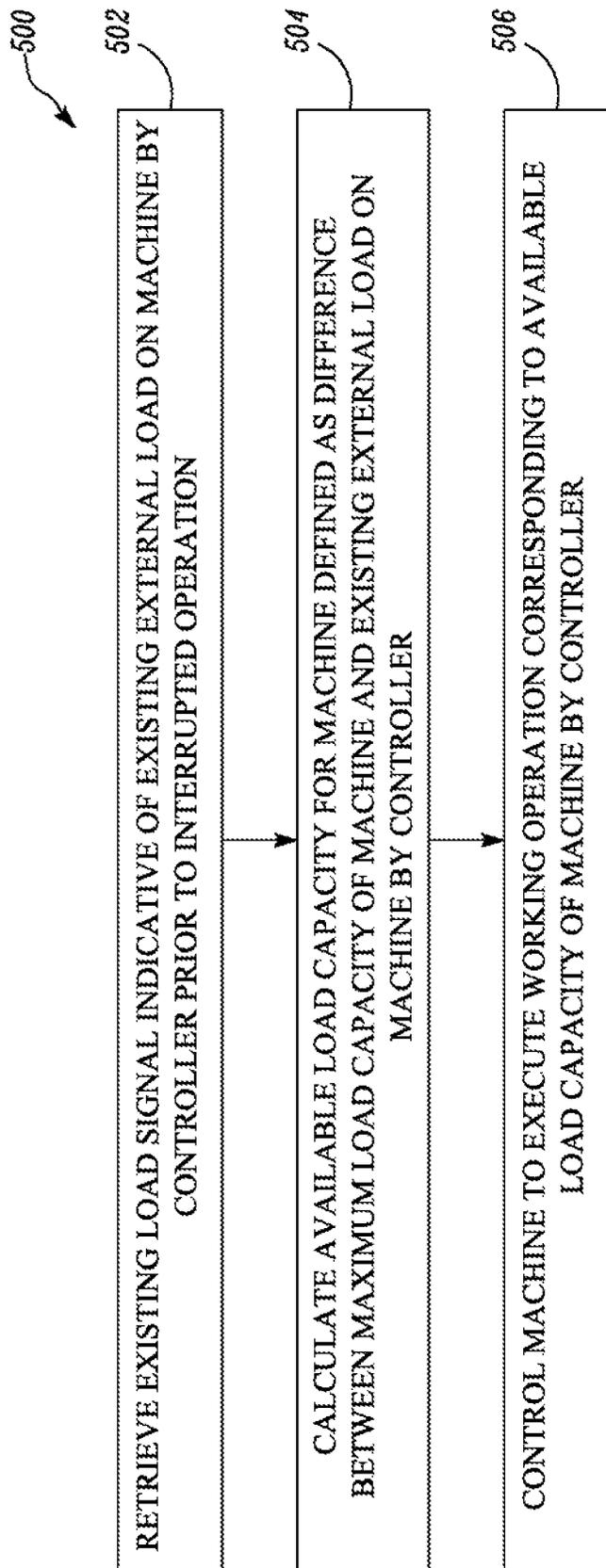


FIG. 5

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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONTROLLING A MACHINE THROUGH AN INTERRUPTED OPERATION

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present disclosure relates to a system and a method for controlling a machine through an interrupted operation of the machine.

BACKGROUND

A machine, such as a dozer, is generally operated in a worksite in one of an autonomous mode, semi-autonomous mode and a manual mode. In the autonomous mode, the machine may be controlled from a central location located remotely from the worksite. Due to various factors, such as connectivity issues, operation of the machine may get interrupted. The machine may be in middle of a task, such as digging soil, when the operation of the machine gets interrupted.

When the machine resumes operation, the machine may start repeating the task again irrespective of the progress of the task before interruption in the operation of the machine. For example, after the dozer restarts, as per current algorithms, the dozer may start digging again corresponding to full digging load irrespective of an existing load on the dozer prior to the interruption. This may cause the dozer to get loaded beyond a maximum load capacity resulting in the dozer getting stuck. In another example, if the dozer is allowed to carry existing load to a dump location, at least some of the load capacity of the dozer may get wasted.

Therefore, there is a need for an improved system and method for controlling the machine through interrupted operation of the machine.

SUMMARY

In an aspect of the present disclosure, a method of controlling a machine through an interrupted operation of the machine is provided. The method further includes retrieving, by a controller, an existing load signal indicative of an existing external load on the machine prior to the interrupted operation. The method also includes calculating, by the controller, an available load capacity for the machine defined as a difference between a maximum load capacity of the machine and the existing external load. The method further includes controlling, by the controller, the machine to execute a working operation corresponding to the available load capacity of the machine.

In another aspect of the present disclosure, a control system for controlling a machine through an interrupted operation of the machine is provided. The control system includes a load sensor which generates an existing load signal. The existing load signal is indicative of an existing external load on the machine prior to the interrupted operation. The control system further includes a controller communicably coupled to the load sensor. The controller retrieves the existing load signal indicative of the existing external load on the machine prior to the interrupted operation. The controller further calculates an available load capacity for the machine defined as a difference between a maximum load capacity of the machine and the existing external load. The controller further controls the machine to execute a working operation corresponding to the available load capacity.

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In yet another aspect of the present disclosure, a machine includes a power source, and a ground engaging member which propels the machine on a ground surface. The machine also includes an implement to execute a working operation. The machine further includes a load sensor which generates an existing load signal indicative of an existing external load on the implement prior to the interrupted operation. The machine further includes a controller communicably coupled to the load sensor. The controller retrieves the existing load signal indicative of the existing external load on the machine prior to the interrupted operation. The controller further calculates an available load capacity for the machine defined as a difference between a maximum load capacity of the machine and the existing external load. The controller further controls the machine to execute a working operation corresponding to the available load capacity.

Other features and aspects of this disclosure will be apparent from the following description and the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows an exemplary machine, according to an aspect of the present disclosure;

FIG. 2 schematically shows a control system for the machine, according to an aspect of the present disclosure;

FIG. 3 schematically shows decision making steps based on existing external load of the machine, according to an aspect of the present disclosure;

FIG. 4 schematically shows a control system for the machine, according to another aspect of the present disclosure; and

FIG. 5 shows a flow chart depicting a method of controlling the machine, according to an aspect of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to same or like parts. FIG. 1 shows an earthmoving machine **100**. In the illustrated embodiment, the machine **100** is shown as a dozer. However, the machine **100** may be any earth moving machine that is configured to move materials on a worksite. Worksites on which the machine **100** may move materials may include, but are not limited to, a mining site, a landfill, a quarry, a construction site, or any other area in which movement of material is desired. The machine **100** may be employed at a worksite for a variety of earth moving operations, such as dozing, grading, leveling, bulk material removal, or any other type of operation that results in alteration of topography of the worksite.

The machine **100** includes a frame **102** and a prime mover, such as an engine **104**. A track **106** is included as a ground-engaging drive mechanism. The track **106** is driven by a drive wheel **108** on each side of the machine **100** to propel the machine **100**. While the machine **100** is shown as having the track **106** and is, generally, a "track-type" machine, other ground-engaging mechanisms may also be contemplated (e.g., tires in a wheeled configuration). For earthmoving, the machine **100** may employ an implement to push or otherwise move materials at the worksite. The implement is illustrated as a blade **110**. However, it should be contemplated that various machines may include different types of implements such as a bucket, a scoop, etc.

During earth moving functions, the blade **110** may initially engage the worksite with a blade tip **112** of the blade **110**. The blade **110** may be pivotally connected to the frame **102** by arms **114** on each side of the machine **100**. One or more first hydraulic cylinders **116** may be coupled to the frame **102** to support the blade **110** in the vertical direction and allow the blade **110** to move up or down vertically. Additionally, one or more second hydraulic cylinders **118** may be included on each side of the machine **100** to allow the pitch angle of the blade tip **112** to change relative to a centerline (not shown) of the machine **100**. The first and second hydraulic cylinders **116**, **118** may be actuators that receive actuation instructions, to adjust, lift, lower, or otherwise move and/or position the blade **110**.

The machine **100** may be operated in an autonomous mode, semi-autonomous mode or a manual mode as well. The present disclosure is not limited by mode of operation of the machine **100** in any manner. Operations of the machine **100** are controlled through a control system **200** schematically depicted in FIG. 2. The control system **200** includes a load sensor **202**. The load sensor **202** is configured to generate an existing load signal **204**. The existing load signal **204** is indicative of an existing external load on the machine **100**. The existing external load refers to weight of soil, or any other material which is being hauled, pushed, lifted, or dragged by the blade **110** of the machine **100**.

For example, the machine **100** may be used to lift soil from a first location on the worksite to a second location. In such a situation, weight of the soil being carried by the machine **100** may be referred to as the existing external load. In another example, the machine **100** may be used to dig a trench through the blade **110**. In such a situation, weight of the material cut by the blade **110** and being moved may be referred to as the existing external load. Therefore, the existing external load may be defined as weight of the material added externally to the machine **100** during a working operation. The working operation may be defined as cutting, moving, digging, hauling, dragging, or adding material externally on the blade **110** of the machine **100** by any other such operation.

The load sensor **202** may be any type of a load sensor which may accurately determine existing external load being carried by the machine **100**. In an embodiment, the load sensor **202** may be a pressure sensor which may sense pressure of hydraulic fluid in the first and second hydraulic actuators **116**, **118** associated with the blade **110**. In an embodiment, the load sensor **202** may be an engine power sensor which may sense amount of power being delivered by the engine **104** of the machine **100** and use the sensed data to estimate the existing external load on the machine **100**. In another exemplary embodiment, the load sensor **202** may sense a geometrical profile of terrain over which the machine **100** is operating before and after a cutting, ripping, digging or any other such operation is executed, and then compare the two profiles to estimate the existing external load. The load sensor **202** may be any other type of sensor as well which may be suitably applied with various aspects of the present disclosure. The present disclosure is not limited by type of the load sensor **202** in any manner.

The control system **200** further includes a controller **206**. The controller **206** is configured to control various operational aspects of the machine **100**. The controller **206** may be any electronic controller or computing system including a processor which operates to perform operations, execute control algorithms, store data, retrieve data, gather data, and/or perform any other computing or controlling task. The controller **206** may be a single controller or may include

more than one controller disposed to control various functions and/or features of the machine **100**. The controller **206** includes an associated memory **208**. The controller **206** may be otherwise connected to an external memory (not shown), such as a database or server. The associated memory **208** and/or external memory may include, but are not limited to including, one or more of read only memory (ROM), random access memory (RAM), a portable memory, and the like.

FIG. 2 illustrates the controller **206** as an on-board controller of the machine **100**. The controller **206** is communicably coupled to the load sensor **202**. The controller **206** receives the existing load signal **204** generated by the load sensor **202** indicative of the existing external load. In an embodiment, the load sensor **202** may be configured to sense the profile of the terrain over which the machine **100** is operating. The controller **206** may receive a pre-cut terrain profile from the load sensor **202**. The pre-cut terrain profile refers to a terrain profile before the machine **100** starts operating. The controller **206** may then receive a post-cut terrain profile from the load sensor **202**. The post-cut terrain profile refers to a terrain profile after the machine **100** has performed an operation on the terrain. The controller **206** may compare the two profiles and estimate the existing external load of the machine **100**. For example, the controller **206** may estimate volume difference between the pre-cut terrain profile and the post-cut terrain profile, and subsequently estimate the existing external load on the machine **100**. The controller **206** may then store the existing external load on the machine **100** in the associated memory **208**.

The controller **206** determines occurrence of an interruption in the operation of the machine **100**. The interruption in operation may be due to various factors, such as lack of connectivity, mechanical failure, electronic anomaly, adverse environmental conditions, or any other such situation which may prompt the machine **100** to stop operations. The controller **206** may determine the occurrence of interruption through monitoring various operational parameters such as engine speed, power output, blade velocity, etc. After the determination of occurrence of the interruption, the controller **206** may initiate a re-starting procedure either by itself or through external intervention. External intervention may be through a worksite personnel, or an electronic device near the machine **100** or through any other suitable method or device.

After the machine **100** resumes operation, the controller **206** retrieves the existing load signal **204** from the memory **208**. The existing load signal **204** is indicative of the existing external load on the machine **100** prior to the interruption in operation of the machine **100**. The controller **206** calculates an available load capacity of the machine **100** based on the existing external load on the machine **100**. The available load capacity is defined as a difference between a maximum load capacity of the machine **100** and the existing external load on the machine **100**. The available load capacity is the additional external load which may be loaded on the machine **100** after the machine **100** is loaded with the existing external load.

After calculating the available load capacity, the controller **206** controls the machine **100** to execute a working operation corresponding to the available load capacity of the machine **100**. The working operation may be defined as any suitable operation which may be performed by the machine **100** which may load the machine **100** by an external load. Examples of the working operation may vary as per the type

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of the machine 100. For example, in an embodiment when the machine 100 is a dozer, the working operation may be a cut and carry operation.

FIG. 3 shows another aspect of the present disclosure illustrating decision making steps for controlling the machine 100. At block 302, the controller 206 determines whether the existing external load lies within a pre-determined load range based on the retrieved existing load signal 204. The pre-determined load range is defined between a lower threshold load (LTL) and an upper threshold load (UTL). If the existing external load lies within the pre-determined range between the lower threshold load and the upper threshold load, the controller 206 moves to block 304. At block 304, the controller 206 calculates the available load capacity. The controller 206 then moves to block 306. At block 306, the controller 206 controls the machine 100 to execute the working operation corresponding to the available load capacity.

If the existing external load is greater than the upper threshold load, the controller 206 moves to block 308. At block 308, the controller 206 controls the machine 100 to execute the working operation corresponding to the existing external load only. In such a case, the controller 206 does not load the machine 100 further. In an exemplary embodiment, when the machine 100 is a dozer, the controller 206 may control the machine 100 to carry the existing external load to a dump location. Further, if the existing external load is lesser than the lower threshold load, the controller 206 moves to block 310. At block 310, the controller 206 controls the machine 100 to execute the working operation corresponding to the maximum load capacity of the machine 100.

The pre-determined load range may be defined based on the various parameters such as type of the machine 100, terrain profile, material being carried by the machine 100 etc. The pre-determined load range also factors in cost of operation of the machine 100 in various scenarios. For example, when the existing external load is greater than the upper threshold load, the machine 100 executes the working operation corresponding to the existing external load and does not pick up any further load. This is because the cost savings incurred in carrying the extra load by the machine 100 may be less than the cost incurred on picking up the extra load. Thus, it is more cost effective to carry the existing external load on the machine 100 to the dump location. Similarly, when the existing external load is lesser than the lower threshold load, the existing external load is practically insignificant to carry out calculations of the available load capacity. Therefore, the pre-determined load range simplifies decision making steps in operation of the machine 100.

FIG. 4 illustrates another embodiment of the control system 200. The controller 206 is illustrated as an off-board controller. The controller 206 may be located at an off-board location relative to the machine 100 such as an external server, a back-office, a remote location from the worksite etc. The controller 206 performs similar functions as the on-board controller. However, an off-board controller may provide better computing performance compared to the on-board controller on account of having better resources at the off-board location. In an embodiment, the controller 206 may communicate with an external server and the calculations may be performed at the external server, thus freeing up memory for carrying out other operational functions of the machine 100 more efficiently.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

The present disclosure provides a method 500 to control the machine 100 through an interrupted operation of the

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machine 100. FIG. 5 illustrates the method 500 through a flowchart. At step 502, the controller 206 retrieves the existing load signal 204. The existing load signal 204 is indicative of the existing external load on the machine 100. The controller 206 retrieves the existing load signal 204 from the associated memory 208. The controller 206 may receive the existing load signal 204 from the load sensor 202 prior to the interruption in the operation of the machine 100. In an embodiment, the controller 206 receives the pre-cut terrain profile, and the post-cut terrain profile from the load sensor 202. The controller 206 may estimate the existing external load based on the difference between the pre-cut terrain profile and the post-cut terrain profile. The controller 206 may store the received existing load signal 204 in the associated memory 208. The controller 206 may further determine the occurrence of interruption of the operation of the machine 100 and retrieve the existing load signal 204 from the associated memory 208 after the machine 100 resumes operation.

At step 504, the controller 206 may calculate the available load capacity of the machine 100 based on the retrieved existing load signal 204. The available load capacity is calculated as the difference between the maximum load capacity of the machine 100 and the existing external load. The controller 206 may further determine whether the existing external load is within the pre-determined load range. The pre-determined load range is defined between the lower threshold load and the upper threshold load.

At step 506, the controller 206 controls the machine 100 to execute the working operation corresponding to the available load capacity of the machine 100. Further, if the existing external load is greater than the upper threshold load, the controller 206 may control the machine 100 to execute the working operation corresponding to the existing external load. In case the existing external load is lesser than the lower threshold load, the controller 206 may control the machine 100 to execute the working operation corresponding to the maximum load capacity of the machine 100.

The present disclosure provides an improved method 500 of controlling the machine 100 through the interrupted operation of the machine 100. After the machine 100 resumes operation, the controller 206 takes into account the existing external load on the machine 100, and accordingly decides further course of action. The controller 206 may calculate the available load capacity and perform the task so that original task gets completed without overloading the machine 100. Thus, the situations such as the machine 100 getting overloaded, or stuck are avoided altogether. Also, the controller 206 may take into account costs involved in resuming the ongoing operation by comparing the existing external load with the pre-determined load range, and then controls the machine 100 to perform a fresh cut or a take-over cut based on the existing external load. Thus, the controller 206 ensures optimal trade-off between loading the machine 100 further, or aborting the ongoing operation based on the existing external load on the machine 100.

While aspects of the present disclosure have been particularly shown and described with reference to the embodiments above, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various additional embodiments may be contemplated by the modification of the disclosed machines, systems and methods without departing from the spirit and scope of what is disclosed. Such embodiments should be understood to fall within the scope of the present disclosure as determined based upon the claims and any equivalents thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of controlling a machine, the method comprising:
 - retrieving, by a controller and after an occurrence of an interruption in operation of the machine, an existing load signal indicative of an existing external load on the machine prior to the occurrence of the interruption in operation of the machine;
 - calculating, by the controller, an available load capacity of the machine based on a difference between a maximum load capacity of the machine and the existing external load; and
 - controlling, by the controller, the machine to execute a working operation corresponding to the available load capacity of the machine.
2. The method of claim 1, further including:
 - determining, by the controller and after the occurrence of the interruption in operation of the machine, that the existing external load is within a pre-determined load range, wherein calculating the available load capacity comprises:
 - calculating, by the controller, the available load capacity of the machine based on determining that the existing external load is within the pre-determined load range.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the pre-determined load range is defined between a lower threshold load and an upper threshold load.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - determining that a different existing external load is less than a lower threshold load; and
 - controlling, by the controller, the machine to execute another working operation corresponding to the maximum load capacity of the machine based on determining that the different existing external load is less than the lower threshold load.
5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - determining that a different existing external load is greater than an upper threshold load; and
 - controlling, by the controller, the machine to execute another working operation corresponding to the existing external load based on determining that the different existing external load is greater than the upper threshold load.
6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - identifying, by the controller, the existing load signal prior to the occurrence of the interruption in operation of the machine;
 - storing, by the controller, the existing load signal in an associated memory of the controller; and
 - determining, by the controller, the occurrence of the interruption in operation of the machine before retrieving the existing load signal.
7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - receiving, by the controller, a pre-cut terrain profile;
 - receiving, by the controller, a post-cut terrain profile; and
 - estimating, by the controller, the existing external load based on a difference between the pre-cut terrain profile and the post-cut terrain profile.
8. A control system for controlling a machine, the control system comprising:
 - a load sensor configured to generate an existing load signal indicative of an existing external load on the machine prior to an occurrence of an interruption in operation of the machine; and

- a controller communicably coupled to the load sensor, the controller configured to:
 - retrieve, after the occurrence of the interruption in operation of the machine, the existing load signal;
 - calculate an available load capacity for the machine based on a difference between a maximum load capacity of the machine and the existing external load; and
 - control the machine to execute a working operation corresponding to the available load capacity.
9. The control system of claim 8, wherein the controller is further configured to:
 - determine that the existing external load is within a pre-determined load range, wherein the available load capacity for the machine is calculated further based on determining that the existing external load is within the pre-determined load range.
10. The control system of claim 9, wherein the pre-determined load range is defined between a lower threshold load and an upper threshold load.
11. The control system of claim 8, wherein the controller is further configured to:
 - control the machine to execute another working operation that corresponds to the maximum load capacity of the machine when a different existing external load is lesser less than a lower threshold load.
12. The control system of claim 8, wherein the controller is further configured to:
 - control the machine to execute another working operation that corresponds to the existing external load when a different existing external load is greater than an upper threshold load.
13. The control system of claim 8, wherein the controller is further configured to:
 - identify the existing load signal;
 - store the existing load signal in an associated memory of the controller; and
 - determine the occurrence of the interruption in operation of the machine before retrieving the existing load signal.
14. The control system of claim 8, wherein the controller is further configured to:
 - receive a pre-cut terrain profile;
 - receive a post-cut terrain profile; and
 - estimate the existing external load based on a difference between the pre-cut terrain profile and the post-cut terrain profile.
15. A machine comprising:
 - a power source;
 - a ground engaging member adapted to propel the machine on a ground surface;
 - an implement adapted to execute a working operation;
 - a load sensor configured to generate an existing load signal indicative of an existing external load on the machine prior to an occurrence of an interruption in operation of the machine; and
 - a controller communicably coupled to the load sensor, the controller configured to:
 - retrieve, after the occurrence of the interruption in operation of the machine, the existing load signal;
 - calculate an available load capacity for the machine based on a difference between a maximum load capacity of the machine and the existing external load; and
 - control the machine to execute a working operation corresponding to the available load capacity.

- 16.** The machine of claim **15**, wherein the controller is further configured to:
determine that the existing external load is within a pre-determined load range,
wherein the available load capacity for the machine is 5
calculated further based on determining that the
existing external load is within the pre-determined
load range.
- 17.** The machine of claim **16**, wherein the pre-determined load range is defined between a lower threshold load and an 10
upper threshold load.
- 18.** The machine of claim **15**, wherein the controller is further configured to:
control the machine to execute another working operation
that corresponds to the maximum load capacity of the 15
machine when a different existing external load is less
than a lower threshold load.
- 19.** The machine of claim **15**, wherein the controller is further configured to:
control the machine to execute another working operation 20
that corresponds to the existing external load when a
different existing external load is greater than an upper
threshold load.
- 20.** The machine of claim **15**, wherein the controller is further configured to: 25
receive the existing load signal before the interruption in
operation of the machine;
store the received existing load signal in an associated
memory of the controller; and
determine the occurrence of the interruption in operation 30
of the machine before retrieving the existing load
signal.

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